Alastair is mostly humanoid once again when the bright Heavenly warriors invade his domain. Alastair is elbow deep in the guts of some hapless sinner when an angel enters the chamber, all wings and fire and bright pure light.

Alastair isn't a suicidal fool, and so as the angel crosses the chamber he lets go of his victim and flees to the side, getting out of the angel's path. He's a demon and he doesn't care, and so the thing was once Dean Winchester (and will be again, he supposes) receives no help from him when the angel blocks its escape.

Then the fire that is the angel fades enough to show hands, and then there is a hand gripping the center of Dean Winchester tightly, and the other hand has a spear in it, ready to defend itself and its catch from any demons.

Alastair raises his hands when the angel looks at him and smiles, for he's not stupid enough to tangle with it. This angel may not be the most powerful he's seen, but he's certain he'd get injured tangling with it. While defeating an angel may be worthwhile, he's not willing to risk it, especially for possession of one broken human soul. Dean Winchester has served his purpose, after all.

Besides, there is another angel entering the chamber and Alastair knows with a look that he's nowhere near strong enough to take that one on and think he can come away alive, and so the angels leave him in peace, prize clutched in their hands.

Castiel, as he was the one to reach Dean Winchester first, receives the honor of rebuilding his body and placing it back on Earth.

Uriel watches him work, watches how the soul - well on its way to being corrupted completely and turned into a demon - struggles in Castiel's hold, and most of all he watches how Castiel keeps one hand clamped down on Dean Winchester, even as he channels his Grace and reforms the human body that Dean Winchester once had.

Uriel's presence upon Earth is as light as he can manage it - most of his form is left unmanisfested, and all he has here is enough to see, and his Voice. Still, he speaks in whispers, for the one word he said at normal volume blasted the ground beneath them.

Castiel would be doing more damage than he already has, but he is also keeping his presence upon the Earth light but for the Grace he is using to rebuild Dean Winchester and the hand he is using to keep him still. Even so, the trees surrounding Dean Winchester's grave are dead, flattened by Castiel's presence.

Uriel would reach out and help, make this go faster, but this is Castiel's duty and honor.

He will, however, answer questions.

"Uriel," Castiel begins in a whisper. "There are imperfections in his form that he was not born with. Marks upon his skin, and places where old injuries leave him in pain. May I omit them?"

They all know what Dean Winchester's significance is. Uriel doesn't even need to think about it.

"Yes." The grass beneath them wilts as they speak, giving up its energy to power Castiel's work. It is simply how they effect the Earth without being shielded by human vessels, but Uriel has never become accustomed to it. Castiel is used to it, as new to this realm of creation as he is, but then he never participated in their war against the Grigori and felt the touch of living soil then.

Castiel doesn't answer him, but Uriel can see as Castiel discards loose flesh that would have been formed into scars and other miscellenia, and he approves of the action.

They are silent until Castiel's work is completed, and then Castiel is placing Dean Winchester below the Earth, in his grave. Uriel does not rebuke Castiel for weakening the coffin and loosening the soil enough to allow Dean Winchester freedom.

"I am returning now," Uriel says. "You will be granted the name of your vessel soon."

Castiel acknowledges this as he forces himself to demanifest as much of himself as he can without actively leaving the Earth. Castiel's job is to watch over Dean Winchester, now, as they will need this human.

Uriel tries not to think of how certain Abdiel sounded when he told Uriel that, as if Abdiel knew that they would fail in defending the seals.

Instead he ascends and leaves Castiel on Earth.

Lucifer can feel it the instant the first of the seals break. With its destruction comes the rush of revelation as he understands exactly what the seals are, and what their complete destcruction will mean, and most importantly what God expects him to do once freed.

The revelation has been delivered to him late - Lucifer also understands that other angels, indeed, even other Fallen angels have known of the seals for years before this moment.

It angers him. It drives him to lash out at the cage simply to feel his fist crumple and break under his strength driving it forward into the cage's walls. It is nothing less than what he expected: his Father is a cruel one, and keeping this knowledge from Lucifer is nothing out of the ordinary, for him.

Lucifer wonders for the first time in years if God still visits Heaven and delivers his Word to his angels. For the first time in years he has a new mental puzzle to work on, beyond the disgusting politics of the demons and the growing apathy from the Fallen. (Angels need purpose, direction in their lives or else they go mad or worse. It's inherent to their natures.)

He doesn't reach out to Lilith, or any other demon to thank them for their service. He doesn't reach out to his Fallen to order them into action.

Instead Lucifer lies on his back in the cage and stares up with unseeing eyes as he puzzles out what he will do when he is freed, and as he tries to understand the mind of God so that he may predict what will come.

(Lucifer's been lacking in purpose for years and years and years, even if he knew that there would be *something* for him someday - why else would he still be alive? But a vague sense of purpose has not helped him. Not enough, certainly.)

Gabriel is caught by surprise when he discovers that the end of all things has begun: sure, he knew that Dean Winchester was going to Hell within a year, but there's a difference between knowing that time is running out and then actually feeling and *knowing* that it was here and now.

Gabriel is caught by surprise when he discovers that the end of all things has begun, and so he immediately dismisses an illusion he was checking out and hides himself in one of his many hideouts. It is there that he sets to checking himself over, making sure there's not a whiff to angel-ness to him and even checking that Loki was still there.

Gabriel pats himself down physically just to be sure, and rolls his shoulders, making use of a mirror to check for wings, and it is with great relief that he can conclude that he appears as he has for thousands of years: he's pagan through and through, so much so that his wings barely ache these days from disuse, and so much so that he thinks nothing of dropping in on Crowley and kissing him without warning.

Crowley, needless to say, is *annoyed*. Gabriel grins at him and leans in to kiss him again, simply because having sex with a demon is one of the best anti-angel things he can do. (There are other activities that would be so much worse than this, but Gabriel's unable to develop a faith in any deity beyond God, and he's not so enthralled with the idea of sadism in general. At least, not the up-close-and-personal version of sadism. And to cap it off, any act beyond those begins to approach the territory of 'even evil has limits', and even Gabriel has standards.)

"Leave," Crowley says, stopping the kiss with a hand to Gabriel's throat. "I'm *busy*." His tone is such that tells Gabriel that he's not kidding about being busy, and this is seriously a moment where he can't drop everything to indulge in his affair with the Trickster.

Gabriel leans back and sighs as dramatically as he can. "Rain check?" He says, and at Crowley's glare he vanishes again.

That was the problem with Crowley, though: he was a businessman, and regardless of how successful he was he still answered to powers above him. Any affairs with him had to be managed carefully so Gabriel didn't pop into the middle of a high-powered business meeting with the torture department of Hell or something. (By the way, if you find yourself doing the above example: Alastair dislikes how cold it is on Earth in the first place, so don't try to placate him with ice cream. Crowley banned Gabriel from coming within fifty miles of him for *months*.)

Gabriel sits on a park bench in some town he hasn't bothered to get the name of yet and tries to figure out what to do. Besides avoid the angels and the vessels and that entire mess.

(Besides try to forget that he *hates* seeing his family hurt each other, and that this is that entire issue all over again.)

He won't interfere, he knows. Even if he likes Earth and its creative chocolatiers. Even if he likes the pagans that he's made connections with as Loki and even if he has the same deep ache in his heart whenever he sees his (unknowingly) adopted family/co-workers/deities fight with each other.

If, or when, Michael wins Gabriel knows that the battles will be over. Completely over. No more angels fighting, no more destruction. Beyond the final judgement of souls, it will be Paradise.

Even if Lucifer wins, the only battles then will be between demons and humans and minor skirmishes between the Fallen, probably. But it will be *over* and that's what truly matters to Gabriel.

So Gabriel amuses himself that afternoon with the classic gold coin glued to a sidewalk gag and tries not to think about it. There are other deities and less beings that he could hang out with, but...but that would require fielding the gossip about these latest events that's sure to be hanging around.

Gabriel narrows his eyes at one particularly determined man and lets the coin pop free with far too much force for a normal coin. The man's left holding his eye and yelling at the pain, and the coin is left as a yellow leaf.

It's petty nastiness and it's exactly what Gabriel wants to indulge in right now. So he does, and if the town that he never bothered get the name of suffers a rash of minor injuries and accidents, well, Gabriel will pick another town soon. He gets bored easily, after all.

Uriel does not like humans. He stops to watch several busy streets and homes as he flies his way towards his vessel, and he does not like what he sees. There is

violence, there is an over-abundance of noise, and most of all there is the evidence of faithless-ness in too many places.

Uriel is aware of what he is, and he is aware that humans have never stood in the presence of a force greater than themselves and truly *known* that they would do anything for their faith. (Uriel has faith, truly he does, as he has seen his kin and what they are and what they can do, and he has seen the brilliance of the original archangels with his own eyes. Yes, he was shaken when Gabriel left the way he did, but he has faith. Truly he does.)

Uriel sees a pair of humans copulating as he passes by, and he cannot help the flash of disgust he feels. They are imperfect, they are everything he knew they would be, and yet Uriel cannot help but feel disappointed by what he sees. Oh, there are bright moments and good acts, but -

Humans are made of dust and earth and God's breath of creation, and Uriel is made of fire and light and God's breath of creation, and so surely he can be forgiven for his distaste.

He finds his vessel at last, and he has to stop and observe, simply to see the human and then to find a way to gain consent from this specific human. It is with a hint of impatience that he becomes the proverbial angel on the shoulder for several hours.

Reginald Mylas is a professor of literature at Vermont State University. He also owns a cat named Orpheus, enjoys reading books, and continues to write letters even though email has overtaken the popularity of letters and rendered them nearly obsolete.

Absolutely none of this is relevant to Uriel's interests.

No, what attracts Uriel's interest is when Reginald Mylas offers up a prayer before his meal and the feelings behind it are genuinely heartfelt.

There are other moments: the quiet enjoyment from making Orpheus purr. The amount of thought he puts into a letter he is writing, and Uriel can see the good-will in the act.

Uriel has time, and so he puts aside another day to watch Reginald Mylas before approaching him, and the man is pleasantly surprising when he defies Uriel's expectations to become petty or crude or imperfect during the day.

There are moments when Reginald Mylas is annoyed, and there are moments when he is petty, but Uriel cannot find malicious intent in them, and so, when Reginald Mylas has finished dining and is completing some tasks from his work, Uriel speaks to him.

Not with his Voice - Uriel wants this man alive, after all. No, instead he struggles

with the technology surrounding his vessel and communicates from there, and he is clear and straightforward about what he is - an angel - and what he wants from Reginald Mylas - his body to contain Uriel's Grace.

Reginald Mylas requests one more night's sleep before he can answer Uriel. He also requests to hear what Uriel is named.

I am Uriel, Uriel answers, and he isn't surprised when Reginald Mylas thanks him quietly and sets to researching what human lore has on Uriel. *Much of that is inaccurate, Reginald Mylas.* He cannot help but want to correct what he sees. He is not one of the original archangels, nor is he of the cherubim. Uriel's not surprised at how much is wrong, but it certainly bothers him to be placed in such high esteem as those angels such as Michael and Gabriel.

"I don't know which is accurate, and I don't have a way to check this, Uriel," Reginald says quietly. "Unless there is an angelic presence on Earth who checks over scholar's papers who I'm not familiar with."

Uriel cannot help but think of Arariel, and how she so enjoyed cataloguing information and how she so enjoyed studying Earth, but he banishes that memory quickly. *There is not.*

"That is a shame," Reginald responds, and he gestures to the open books before him. "Could you confirm or deny any of this?"

Uriel cannot say he approves of curiosity in general: it has never been kind to angels before, after all. But humans are different beings altogether, and he cannot find it in himself to deny Reginald's request.

I am not one of the 'four angels of the presence', and I am ranked far below those such as Michael, Raphael and Gabriel. Uriel says after a long moment. *I do not preside over Tartarus, and I have spoken with very few humans before you. I known as the fire of God most likely because I wield twin blades of fire and am often used in combat. I suspect that these sources rank me so highly in the hierarchy due to certain duties Gabriel requested of me. Is that enough?*

Reginald writes quickly and in shorthand, and nods when Uriel finishes speaking. "That's more than I could have hoped for. Thank you."

If we are finished for tonight then I will return in the morning. Uriel says, preparing to go.

"Wait," Reginald says, holding up a hand. "Where are you going?"

I have duties that I can complete without a vessel. Good night, Reginald Mylas. Uriel says firmly, and then he is gone.

When the next morning comes, and when Reginald says yes, Uriel isn't surprised

by the decision in the least. Even if Reginald gave him some conditions to that yes. (See to it that my cat is taken care of. Let me continue my correspondence with my letters. Etcetera. There is nothing too taxing in his demands, and no real reason for Uriel to deny them.)

Lucifer has been developing plans and discarding them as swiftly as he conceives of them, and each time he second guesses himself: he would like nothing more than to defy God's expectations of him and truly succeed, but he knows what God is capable of.

Lucifer wonders if acting as impulsively as possible would surprise God, and discards the idea once more. He tells himself to drop the idea, to get on with proper planning, but like a cat with a piece of string he cannot drop it and let it go.

Lucifer sits on air, held up by his own power as he tries a new angle for his plan: what about his vessel? What about Sam Winchester, this human that he must win over so that he may finish his fight with Michael on equal standing?

Lucifer reaches out with his Grace and his mind and he finds a demon with the information he seeks: what the demons have observed of this human, and while he cannot trust demons as reliable sources of information, he is unwilling to trouble the Fallen for this. Unfortunately he has no true way of viewing Earth from his prison without borrowing the eyes and ears of a partial vessel, and even more unfortunately his favorite demon for that purpose has been avoiding Hell rather excessively. (Lucifer can't say he's surprised at how skittish the demon is. Lucifer can't say he cares, though.)

It doesn't take Lucifer long to see why Sam Winchester is his vessel. This human has been made for him, made so that he will understand what Lucifer is fighting for, and what he is fighting against.

For Sam Winchester has an older brother, has a father he disagrees with in a fundamental way, has no mother, and most of all Sam Winchester has a 'forbidden' taste for demonic blood.

It doesn't take a genius to see all of the parallels between Lucifer and this human, although Sam Winchester is more of a miniature caricature of the Archangel, now Archfiend, Lucifer.

Lucifer has to let the portion of his power that is holding him up go, and he falls to the floor with a painful thump, and all he can do is laugh and laugh, as somehow, someway he wouldn't be surprised if this human would be imperfect enough to try and defy fate, and wouldn't *that* be fitting as well!

Castiel is watching Jimmy Novak when he feels the strange tug of magic on his

form, and it takes him but a moment to realize that some human is calling him with the connection he forged with Dean Winchester when he remade the man.

He had not intended for the bond to be as strong as it is, not when he formed it, and so Castiel cannot help but answer the tug, and he finds Dean Winchester and a small circle of people summoning him.

The woman wants him to appear before her. The woman *wants* him to manifest before her.

Castiel does not know how to counter human magics, and he does not know how to deny what she is ordering when she uses his link to Dean Winchester.

He does the only thing he can, and whispers to her: *I am here. I am Castiel. Do not continue this and turn back.*

She pauses in her chanting, and for a moment Castiel thinks that he will be fortunate enough to have her stop.

But then she speaks: "Castiel? No. Sorry, Castiel, I don't scare easy."

And then she continues. Castiel despairs as he continues whispering warnings, for he does not want to harm Dean Winchester or anyone here, and to his relief her command changes: he is to show only her his face.

Still, he has to try one more warning before he can resist the order any longer: *Viewing my true visage will harm you, human.*

It doesn't help. Castiel can only watch in dismay as she is granted a vision of his true form, and then she is screaming as her body reacts badly to the sight. It is not because of how poorly he looks, or because of his intent. It is simply what angels *are*, and without safeguards they cause harm to humanity.

Castiel watches as the circle is broken as Dean Winchester and the other people there attempt to help her. Castiel is pleased to see that Dean Winchester is intact and well, just as he intended, and then Castiel leaves, returning to his vessel.

The sooner he has his vessel, the sooner he can return and greet Dean Winchester properly.

When Castiel reports to Uriel immediately after he obtains Jimmy Novak's consent, he finds the other angel waiting for him, and to Castiel's great relief he can still see the radiance of Uriel's form roiling slowly beneath his vessel's form. It reassures him that he will be able to recognize his kin even if they wear vessels.

"Castiel," Uriel greets him. "Tell me your opinion of wearing one of these."

(Neither angel finds anything wrong in refer to their vessels as objects, as if they

were clothing - for once consent has been gained, and provided they uphold their ends of the bargains, they are at liberty to do as they please in their vessels.)

Castiel gives Uriel's question the attention and thought it deserves, and at length he answers with: "Confining. Confusing. There are physical urges that I do not know how to interpret." He pauses and extends a hand, curling his fingers into a fist and back again. "While it is...similar to our true forms, it is strange enough that these motions require more effort than I expected."

Uriel nods, taking in the answer. "We can compensate for the flaws, thankfully." Then he turns his attentions to other business, and asks about Dean Winchester. "When will you appear to him?"

"Soon," Castiel answers, and then, with almost uncanny timing, a summons reaches his being and *tugs*. Castiel has to straighten and resist it with effort, and even so he can see Uriel recognizing what has happened.

"They discovered your name?" Uriel asks, and Castiel jerks his head down in assent. "Then go. We have work for Dean Winchester, and the sooner he becomes used to working for us, the better. I will speak with you later."

Castiel dips his head once more and is gone, flying with the strange twisting of reality he is forced to employ while in his vessel, and he is soon preparing to speak with Dean Winchester.

Gabriel drops in on Crowley once again several days later, and this time he starts by ringing the doorbell before letting himself in.

Gabriel's done this little routine a few times before, and he knows what he's in for the moment he steps inside, and so he is already braced against the impact of Edith as the Hellhound slobbers all over him. He even remembers to reinforce his clothing against the acid in the slobber, and so he can laugh when Edith attempts to dig her nose into his pockets for the treats that he's brought her.

Gabriel, after all, is a smart Trickster: when wooing a demon for an extended affair and general open door policy, win over that demon's prized pets. It makes it that much more difficult for said demon to toss him out on his ear.

He pulls out the plastic-wrapped steak in his pocket and gives it to her with a minimum of fuss and a lot of petting, and to his great relief Crowley doesn't shoot him on sight when he comes in.

"I left without a fuss," Gabriel says, still petting Edith. "And I'm making the right gestures of chiminage, right?"

"That doesn't mean anything right now, and you know it." Crowley says. "Life, for me, is going to become incredibly busy. I don't have time for games with you."

"Those nutters have set the Judeo-Christian Apocalypse in motion and you need to manage whatever portions of it that you can do that you survive the entire bloody mess, right?" Gabriel leaned back, sighing even as Edith sat on his foot. "You know, I'd hoped to postpone this parting of the ways."

"Leave before you get sappy, Loki." Crowley's eyes were hard. "Contact me only if you have business of some sort."

"Yes, yes, I understand." Gabriel backed towards the door. "No chance of a farewell kiss?"

"None." Crowley said. "Unless we're making a formal deal out of this."

Gabriel shook his head and raised his hand to snap his fingers. "Goodbye, Crowley. It was fun." And he snapped, and he was gone.

All he could think was that it was nice while it lasted, and that he really rather detested the entire concept of the apocalypse - it was ending things he would have liked to keep.

Still, there was nothing he could do about it: if was active in any recognizable way to the angels, things would only get worse.

Gabriel did make one concession to the coming storm: he began to keep a closer eye on exactly what all the major players were doing, even if he was forced to be subtle about it.

It did not take long for Uriel to form an opinion on Dean Winchester: he rather detested the boy.

It did not take long before Uriel realized that Castiel did not share this opinion.

"He frustrates me," Castiel tells him quietly. "I find it surprising that he is to be Michael's vessel, as he is lacking in a number of traits I had believed would be required for such an important human."

"He is meant for Michael, Castiel. I believe he fits his role well, even if he is...human." Uriel twists the word human into an insult, and he leans forward. "You shouldn't question these events, Castiel."

"You have allowed me to question before."

"This is no patrol. These events, and these orders - we should not question them, Castiel."

Castiel is silent, and Uriel rests his hands on his knees. He must wonder: he has

been questioning what he has been told, as Abdiel passes along orders to defend these seals and keep an eye on Dean Winchester, and he has been questioning more and more the worth of these humans.

It brings to mind an old memory, of one of his few ordered visitations to Earth - not as a messenger, that time, but instead sent to destroy cities of wickedness and worse. Uriel had believed fervently then that those humans in those cities had been a rare example of the worst humanity had to offer.

Uriel was forced to spend time observing humanity as he was ordered to defend seals and more, and so he saw that what he had destroyed had only been a small sampling of wickedness, and he could barely walk down a street without finding a human worthy of his presence.

The trend had only continued as he spent more time on Earth, and it disgusted him. Angered him. How could he not feel anger when they were still commanded to put their hopes in one human? How they were commanded to protect these creatures, when Uriel saw much of what he had destroyed in Dean Winchester.

Uriel could not share these doubts with Castiel, not yet, not when Castiel was still naive enough to trust in what he was told.

Uriel, however...Uriel had been taught much by Gabriel, and Uriel had witnessed much in his time. (Due to rank, due to duties, due to chance, even.)

"I should go," Castiel says at last, and stands. When Uriel looks up, Castiel is gone.

It makes Uriel wonder, but who is he to question other angels when he is questioning so much himself?

Uriel is recalled to Heaven to mobilize additional garrisons and coordinate the defenses of more seals, and so he leaves Reginald in his home and ascends up, up into Heaven to liaise with Abdiel.

He flies in through the main gate, stopping as appropriate to greet certain angels, and then he has reached Abdiel's meeting rooms. (Abdiel has been designated as the go between when it came to Michael and Raphael's orders and Uriel's duties on earth. Without Gabriel bucking the trend, Uriel answers to Abdiel and it is only through his proven trustworthiness with completing tasks that has Abdiel continuing to assign him the management of certain important events on Earth.)

Uriel nods to Dobiel as the other angel leaves, and then he is standing before the seraphim Abdiel once again.

"Ah, Uriel," Abdiel says. "I am pleased to see you back in Heaven."

(Uriel, if he may voice his opinion, (and he may *not*) dislikes Abdiel very much.)

"I returned as ordered," Uriel says, and waits for an opening to speak once again.

"Yes, yes, so you did." Abdiel considers him. "All of your angels have found the vessels to be in proper working order, correct?"

"Yes, we have. There have been some minor requests from several to gain consent, but nothing onerous to fulfill." Those angels who had vessels who requested protection for family Uriel had drafted several lesser angels to watch over them instead of maintaining patrols in Heaven. It would not do to have demons or even simpler problems compromising a vessel if consent was required again.

"I am glad to hear it, Uriel. Very glad indeed." There's a moment as Abdiel brings his hands up and together in a quiet clap, and then he is all business once again. "Is Michael's vessel doing well?" There's the unspoken question of 'did Castiel complete his task well?' It's something Uriel's expecting, and he can't say he likes Abdiel's attitude in regards to Castiel.

"Dean Winchester is in good condition, and will be ready if we need him. Castiel is watching over him."

"Has he appeared to Dean Winchester yet?" At Uriel nod Abdiel sighs. "I don't envy him the task, but this does hamper how any other angels are going to interact with Castiel. At the very least Castiel should be treated as if he were of a higher order, and deferred to in the presence of humans."

Uriel almost, almost avoids asking why, but fails: "Why?" And he earns a sharp look from Abdiel at the question, but he is answered.

"Humans are fond of having an overly inflated sense of self-importance, as I recall. If the angel who brought him back from Hell is perceived as one of some rank, then Dean Winchester will feel that sense of importance, deserved or not. And we do want Dean Winchester to be happy with his lot, after all."

Uriel says nothing, thinking it over.

"If you come into contact with Dean Winchester, defer to Castiel. Not excessively, but enough to convince the vessel. And *don't* let this go to Castiel's head."

"Castiel is no fool."

"Even better!" Abdiel chuckles to himself. "Keep an eye on them both, Uriel."

"Understood. May I go?"

"Oh, no. Wait a moment, I nearly forgot: I do have an assignment that you and Castiel need to carry out with Dean Winchester's involvement."

Uriel restrains any signs of irritation and listens attentively as Abdiel details the

assignment: a test of Dean Winchester's character, with a seal at stake.

The orders are conveyed to Castiel, and the assignment is carried out. Uriel's first official meeting with Dean Winchester only further solidifies his opinion: he does not like him, not at all.

It doesn't help at all to see Lucifer's vessel in one piece, and even worse - already with a demonic taint that shows so clearly to Uriel's eyes that he wonders at how Dean Winchester can fail to see it. (He is aware that Castiel has warned Dean Winchester about the path his brother is taking. That does not change the fact that Uriel has to restrain all of his instincts that say 'purify and destroy the demon before me' and that? That takes effort.)

Perhaps it should offer some consolation that Dean Winchester is Michael's vessel, and not Uriel's, and so all he is required to do is keep Dean Winchester alive.

It's not a consolation, however, and Uriel cannot help but question why such a flawed man is the most important vessel for the angels, and Uriel cannot but express his irritation to Castiel when Dean Winchester prevents them from protecting the seal.

The word 'mudmonkeys' comes to mind and he says it, and even as Castiel rebukes him for the usage, Uriel has to laugh. It simply so *appropriate*, even if it is supposedly incorrect.

It isn't authorized. Castiel knows nothing of this visit, and Uriel has no intention of informing him later.

He appears before Sam Winchester alone and confronts him about the demonic taint in his veins. About the powers he has been using, and their source.

To Uriel's disgust, Sam *defends* the use of his ill-gained powers and he clearly has no intention of stopping from using them.

Perhaps that is why he tells Sam clearly that he will destroy him if necessary. Perhaps that is why he thinks he may be telling the truth as he threatens him.

Perhaps that is why he cannot resist delivering the barb about Dean Winchester and what he did in Hell. Perhaps he cannot help but want to further wreck these vessels: if his hand were not stayed, they would be little more than stains upon the Earth.

Uriel knows that he is thinking dangerous thoughts, and feeling dangerous things. He knows that he is straying too close to Lucifer's original point of view. He knows all of this, and yet he cannot find it in himself to back away from the abyss before

him.

Events go along rather quickly after that. Uriel and Castiel discover that Arariel - now Anna Milton - is interfering with their plans. Uriel does not find it surprising that the Winchesters and their pet demon attempt to protect her. They don't know what she's done, and most of all, they don't understand.

Uriel finds that he enjoys making Dean Winchester feel pain.

Uriel falls farther into doubt.

It is a testament to how far he's fallen that when he first realizes that Lucifer, if freed, would destroy these humans and wipe the Earth clean of their presence - it is a testament to how far from Heaven he's strayed when he doesn't reject the thought immediately.

Instead, he thinks about it. Turns the idea over and around in his head, and he wonders about Heaven and how many seals have already broken, and he wonders if they will succeed in preventing Lucifer from being freed.

The realization, when it comes, makes him feel like a fool: with Lucifer freed, Michael can settle the score. Finish the fight that was left unfinished for so many years. Raphael will be able to return to battle, and most of all? Most of all there will be a conclusion to all of their existences.

If nothing else, Uriel realizes that he has nothing to lose by hastening the breaking of the seals.

Of the original seven angels in their garrison, only four remain when Uriel decides to seek their help in freeing Lucifer.

Arariel isn't dead, not yet, but she is dead to them: she removed her Grace and Fell to Earth and became a human. It does not matter that she has retrieved her Grace and remembered who she is. She is no longer an angel of importance to Uriel.

Tzaphiel fell in battle with demons while retrieving Dean Winchester in Hell. Uriel cannot say he misses the archangel, but he is certain that Tzaphiel would have understood what he was asking, and he regrets the loss of an ally.

Sachiel too fell in battle, but in the defense of a seal, but Uriel knows no details of his loss: he was elsewhere, defending other seals, and so only Penatiel, an angel serving with him witnessed his death.

Uriel thinks of the four who remain, and it with regret that he concludes that he must ask Castiel for his help as late as he can push it. He has seen how Castiel has been sympathizing with Dean Winchester too often and too much, and he knows that despite Castiel's experiences with battle and Gabriel that Castiel still has faith in God, and has no hatred for humanity.

So Uriel begins his search for allies by speaking with Cassiel, from the Order of Powers first of all.

"You are asking me to betray Heaven, Uriel," Cassiel says to him, expression at once dubious and troubled as well as thoughtful.

"I do not believe that I am. Do you recall how Raphael changed in battle? And how he has remained since then?"

It is only one of the reasons that Uriel has for freeing Lucifer, but this is Cassiel, and Cassiel had been there - he had been one of the angels created at the same time Uriel was, and he had survived the original battles with a measure of power and skill and luck.

"Michael." Cassiel says, understanding, and Uriel feels relief wash over him. He respects Cassiel, and he had not relished the idea of slaying the Power.

"Yes," Uriel answers, and he says no more. He doesn't need to.

Asasiel's reaction is worse. Uriel regrets what he must do, but he drives his sword through her throat as soon as he can.

His only relief is that it is painless for her, and he gives her a moment of silence before he leaves.

There are other angels who agree to help him. There are other angels he is forced to kill.

Uriel is not discovered as the culprit until the debacle with Alastair.

Alastair is dead, Dean Winchester has been hurt, and Uriel is being summoned by Castiel. It is not a true summoning, simply a call for Uriel to come to him and speak with him, and Uriel answers it in good time.

"You called?" Uriel asks, watching Castiel examine the water pipe. He's not proud of what he had to do, but the demon's presence was only hindering them, and

while Uriel won't admit it, he had been pleased to hear that Dean Winchester suffered for his work.

Unfortunately, he can't say that he likes that Castiel had been hurt by the demon, and most of all he can't say that likes how Castiel cares about Dean Winchester.

"What do you say, Castiel?" Uriel had spoken to Castiel about his fears on how Heaven was failing, with the seals, and if not every word he had spoken had been truth, well - now was the time for Castiel to hear the rest of it, and make his decision. (Uriel hoped that Castiel would choose wisely. Uriel couldn't put this off for much longer, and even if he cared about Castiel, he would not hesitate to make the final blow.) "Will you join me? Will you fight with me?"

Castiel turns, but doesn't look at him. Uriel *knows* that Castiel has figured out that the pipe leaked due to something other than an accident, but he doesn't give it away.

"Strange. Strange how a leaky pipe can undo the work of angels when we ourselves are supposed to be the agents of fate."

Uriel wants to laugh, to tell Castiel that he can see right through this beginning of a confrontation. But no, no. He plays along. "Alastair was much more powerful than we had imagined." And that, if anything, was true: Alastair had survived Castiel's purification, the blast of Arariel's Grace as it was restored, and even if Castiel wasn't exactly the most powerful angel in the garrison, no demon should have been able to survive a purification.

"No," Castiel says. "No demon can overpower that trap. I made it myself." (And if there is one other skill that Castiel has besides his speed, it is his mastery at creating traps. For the longest time Uriel thought it was a redundant skill, as demons were meant to be destroyed and other angels, more power angels were meant to bind the Fallen, and there wasn't much else for them to bind.)

They meet each other gazes for a moment, and Uriel can see the pleading in Castiel's eyes, and the denials that he wants to cling to.

"You have helped me before, Uriel. I would go so far as to consider us friends." Castiel keeps his eyes on Uriel as he delivers a little-used argument. "We're brothers, Uriel. Pay me that respect. Tell me the truth."

It's the moment he's been dreading. It's the moment he's been anticipating. Uriel looks at Castiel one last time before he begins to summon his sword.

"The truth is, the only thing that can kill an angel..." Here Uriel lets his sword show in his hand, and he can see the betrayed look in Castiel's eyes. "...is another angel."

There is silence for a moment as Uriel watches Castiel put the puzzle pieces together.

"You." Castiel says at last.

"I'm afraid so."

"And you broke the devil's trap, set Alastair on Dean - "

"Alastair should never have been taken alive, Castiel. That was inconvenient." Uriel shakes his head. "Yes, I did turn the screw a little. Alastair should have killed Dean and escaped, and you should have gone on blaming the demons."

"For the murders of our kin?"

"Their deaths were unfortunate but necessary, Castiel. They would not join me." Uriel turns, gesturing at the room, to the blood on the floor. "Do you understand what we have been fighting for? *Dying* for?"

"Humanity. Our Father's creation." Castiel answers immediately.

"And have you *seen* humanity?" Uriel shakes his head. "Whining, puking creations made out of dust and water. They have not rising above their ignoble creation in all this time, and I would argue that they have sunk to greater depths since their first days on this planet!"

It is a long held anger, one that Uriel has been silent about for too long. He stops himself from going on with effort, and then he can see that no matter what he says that Castiel will not agree with him.

Uriel can't see what Castiel sees in the mudpeople.

"You are trying to make me join you, Uriel," Castiel says quietly. "I cannot betray Heaven."

"I want you to either join me or remain silent about my activities, Castiel. It won't be long before the seals are broken, after all."

Uriel watches as more puzzle pieces slide into place for Castiel, and he grips his blade tighter. He's certain now that he will be forced to use it, but he cannot help but continue to try, and failing that, then to hear Castiel out. It is what he owes him, after all.

"Uriel," Castiel says, and his voice is unnaturally neutral. "You want Lucifer to be freed."

"Yes. You weren't there, Castiel. He was so strong. So beautiful. And he didn't bow to humanity. He was struck down for defending us, Castiel. Now, if you want to believe in something, believe in him." It's blasphemy, and Uriel still has the momentary shift of hesitation before he can say it. But he does, and his voice is firm, pleading and knowing and everything he needs it to be.

"Lucifer is not God."

"God isn't God anymore. He doesn't care what we do. I am proof of that." Uriel thinks of Gabriel once more, and he remembers how he left, and most of all he remembers how Gabriel is still missing - he is not dead, all of the angels would know if he were, and he is *still* missing.

"But this?" Castiel asks, and there is anger in his voice. Uriel knows he has lost his chance. "What were you going to do, Uriel? Kill the rest of the garrison?"

Uriel can't help it: as Castiel had said, they are friends. He tries once more, just once more.

"I only killed the ones who said no, Castiel. Others have joined me. Now, please," He *wants* Castiel to bend, to join him, he wants it badly: "Brother, don't fight me. Help me. Help me bring on the apocalypse. All you have to do is be unafraid."

"For the first time in a long time, I am," Castiel answers, and it is due to how greatly Uriel wants to believe that Castiel is saying what he thinks he is saying, and it is due to how badly Uriel doesn't want to kill Castiel that he drops his guard and completely misinterprets what Castiel means.

Castiel's punch catches him completely by surprise and that is why Uriel is flung so far, and that is why Uriel is slow to stand. That is why he drops his blade.

The moment he is standing once again, however, Uriel has resigned himself to the loss of one more of his family. Castiel is ready to fight to the death if need be, and Uriel cannot bring it in himself to end it without giving Castiel a token effort.

He doesn't go for his blade. He matches Castiel's fists with his own, and now, now that he is aware and ready for the blows, they do little to him. Uriel matches the blows, and Castiel is soon thrown across the room, and Uriel crosses the room, ready to finish it, still stalling, not moving as fast as he could be.

Castiel scrambles to his feet and fights back, desperation clear in his eyes, as well as a strange sort of calm. Uriel draws blood from Castiel's vessel, and then Castiel is on his knees before him, and it is nearly done.

Castiel speaks.

"You can't win, Uriel. I still serve God."

Uriel's first reaction is a bitter, bitter mix of envy and anger, and he doesn't bother to hide it. "You haven't even *met* the man!" Uriel punches Castiel across the face. "There is no will." He punches him again. "No wrath." Again. "No God."

There is the sound of wings, and the burn of his sword in his throat. There is Arariel, now Anna, whispering in his ear.

There is only anger burning out, and then there is nothing but *light*.

Part VI & Epilogue.